What's being done to protect California deer?

In 1999 the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) began a CWD surveillance program for wild, free-ranging deer. More than 2,000 deer and 100 elk have been sampled and tested. All tests have been negative for CWD. The DFG plans to continue the surveillance program indefinitely and will test more than 600 deer and elk this year. California is considered a "low risk" state for CWD because of its long-term ban on the importation of live elk, prohibition on elk farming, and its strict monitoring of live deer importations. All deer importations are closely regulated by the DFG resulting in few deer being imported into the state during the past 20 years.

In 2003 the California Fish and Game Commission adopted the following regulation restricting the importation of hunter-harvested deer or elk:

California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 712

No hunter harvested deer or elk (cervid) carcass or parts of cervid carcass shall be imported into the State, except for the following body parts:

(a) boned-out meat and commercially processed cuts of meat.
(b) portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached.
(c) hides with no heads attached.
(d) clean skull plates (no meat or tissue attached) with antlers attached.
(e) antlers with no meat or tissue attached.
(f) finished taxidermy heads.
(g) upper canine teeth (buglers, whistlers, ivories).

Hunters can help

Follow Other States' CWD Regulations

If you will be hunting out of state in a known CWD endemic area, you should receive information at the time you receive your hunting tag(s) regarding disposal of the carcass remains and mandatory or voluntary CWD testing.

"No Skull, No Backbone"

When returning home with deer and elk harvested out of state, hunters must follow California's strict regulations to avoid bringing CWD into our state. The California regulations can be summarized in one phrase: "No skull, no backbone."

Use Caution When Handling Game

- Wear rubber gloves when field dressing carcasses;
- Bone out meat from the animal;
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal cord, eyes, spleen, and lymph nodes and avoid consuming these tissues;
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed.

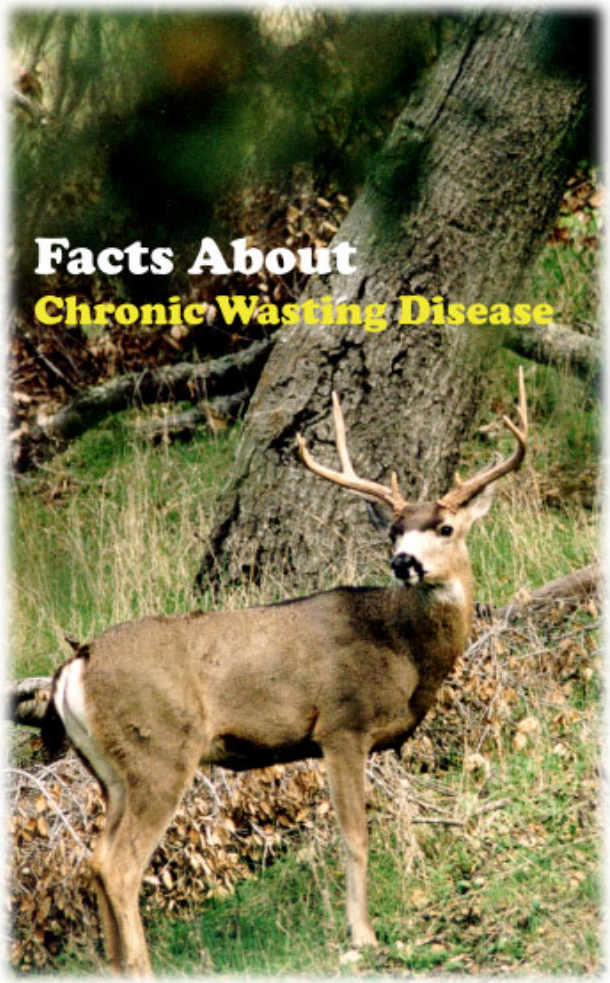
Report Sick Animals

Immediately contact the DFG's Wildlife Investigations Laboratory, at the number below, to report deer or elk that appear to be displaying symptoms of CWD.

Get Your Head Examined!

Submit the head of your California-harvested deer or elk for free testing by visiting one of the specially staffed check stations or meat lockers. Visit www.dfg.ca.gov for locations during the 2005 deer and elk seasons, or call the DFG Wildlife Investigations Laboratory.

For more information contact:
California Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Investigations Laboratory
1701 Nimbus Road, Suite D
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670
(916) 358-2790
www.dfg.ca.gov



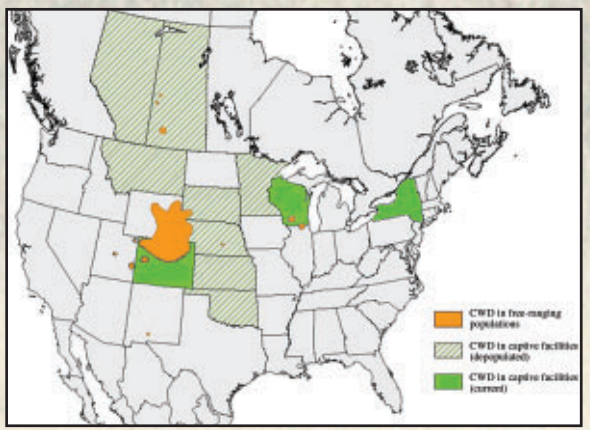
RESOURCES AGENCY CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT FISH & GAME

California Department of Fish & Game
2005

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal neurological disease affecting deer and elk. CWD belongs to a group of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). Within this family of diseases, there are several other variants that affect domestic animals: scrapie, which has been identified in domestic sheep and goats for more than 200 years; bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle (also known as "mad cow disease"); and transmissible mink encephalopathy in farmed mink.

Several rare human diseases are also TSEs. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) occurs naturally in about one out of every one million people worldwide. Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (v-CJD) has been associated with the large-scale outbreak of BSE in cattle herds in Great Britain.



Where and when did CWD originate?

The origin of CWD is unknown, and it may never be possible to definitively determine how or when CWD arose. It was first recognized as a syndrome in captive mule deer held in wildlife research facilities in Colorado in the late 1960s, but it was not identified as a TSE until the 1970s. Computer modeling suggests the disease may have been present in free-ranging populations of mule deer for more than 40 years.

How is CWD spread?

It is not known exactly how CWD is transmitted. The agent that causes the disease is thought to be an infectious protein called a "prion." It may be passed in feces, urine or saliva. The minimal incubation period between infection and development of disease appears to be approximately 16 months. The maximal incubation period is unknown.

Because CWD infectious agents are extremely resistant in the environment, transmission may be both direct and indirect. Concentrating deer and elk in captivity or by artificial feeding probably increases the likelihood of both direct and indirect transmission.

Natural movements of wild deer and elk contribute to the spread of the disease, and human transportation of animals also appears to create a significant risk.

Can humans contract CWD?

Currently, there is no evidence that CWD poses a risk for humans; however, public health officials recommend that human exposure to the CWD infectious agent be avoided as they continue to evaluate any potential health risk.

Hunters are encouraged not to consume meat from animals known to be infected. In addition, hunters should take common sense precautions when field dressing and processing deer or elk taken in areas where CWD is found.

What are the symptoms of CWD?

The most obvious and consistent clinical sign is weight loss over time. CWD affected animals continue to eat but amounts of feed consumed are reduced, leading to gradual loss of body condition. Excessive drinking and urination are common in the terminal stages.

Behavioral changes also occur in the majority of cases, including decreased interactions with other animals, listlessness, lowering of the head, blank facial expression and repetitive walking in set patterns. In elk, behavioral changes may also include hyper-excitability and nervousness. Excessive salivation, drooling and grinding of the teeth also are observed.

How is CWD diagnosed?

Currently, the only conclusive diagnosis involves an examination of the brain, tonsils or lymph nodes performed after death.

Research is being conducted to develop live-animal diagnostic tests for CWD. Early results indicate that a new live-test utilizing tissues from an animal's tonsils may be viable in deer, but so far has been ineffective in elk.